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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio and other electronic media quoted Acting PM Ehud Olmert as saying last night before the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations: "The day [PA Chairman Mahmoud] Abbas will appoint a Hamas representative to head a government, we will review all contacts" with the authority. Olmert was also quoted as saying: "We will not negotiate and we will not deal with a PA that will be dominated wholly or partly by a terrorist organization." Media also reported that Olmert praised the international community, and specifically U.S. President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for leading an uncompromising stance on Hamas and insisting the group must honor past agreements with Israel. Olmert also lauded Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah for insisting Hamas must renounce terrorism and recognize Israel. Olmert also denounced what he called Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's obsessive expressions of anti-Semitism. Leading media reported that during his visit to Egypt, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz warned that if a Hamas member were elected chairman of the Palestinian parliament on Saturday, Israel would cut contacts with the PA within days. The Jerusalem Post wrote that Olmert's setting Saturday as the critical date means that Israel would most likely not transfer next month's customs and tax revenue -- expected to be some USD 60 million -- to the PA. The Jerusalem Post reported that the Quartet will continue raising money for the PA as long as Abbas remains the head of an interim government. The Jerusalem Post quoted one Western diplomatic official as saying that it was likely that Olmert moved up the date because of electoral considerations and the sharp criticism he came under last week after deciding to transfer the tax and customs revenues to the PA.

Major media quoted Mofaz as saying in Cairo: "Through Hamas, the axis of evil will continue to other countries where there are radical organizations. If the terms set by Israel are not realized, we may find ourselves facing a Hamas authority, and we shall not agree to such a situation." In an interview with Israel TV's Oded Granot, Mubarak attempted to reassure Israel over Hamas's victory in the Palestinian elections, saying that the movement should be given a chance and might contribute to peace. Mubarak told Granot: "Many years ago, in 1950, didn't we say that we would throw Israel into the sea? Did Israel end up in the sea? There were wars, but Israeli-Egyptian relations are good today."

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that on Tuesday, the U.S. administration denied a New York Times report about an alleged American-Israeli plan to destabilize the new Hamas-led government. Ha'aretz quoted U.S. officials as saying off-the-record that they suspect that The New York Times' information came from Europeans who want to

make it harder for the U.S. and Israel to isolate Hamas until it meets the conditions imposed by the Quartet.

Israel Radio quoted Khaled Mashal, the head of Hamas's political bureau, as saying in Sudan on Tuesday that peace in the Middle East can be achieved only when Israel puts an end to the occupation. Mashal reportedly called on the U.S. and the international community to pressure Israel to end the occupation, and that otherwise, Hamas would continue its struggle. The radio cited Hamas as denying that it is collecting weapons in the Gaza Strip. Yediot reported that senior Hamas elements in Gaza recently tried to open a secret "back channel" with Israel and the U.S., but that Israel refused to engage in talks with Hamas. Yediot said that the background of those efforts is an attempt by Hamas in the territories to start a dialogue -- even a tactical one -- with Israel, as it confronts the more radical branch of Hamas abroad.

The Jerusalem Post reported that four days after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he would invite Hamas to Turkey for talks, Turkish FM Abdullah Gul told FM Tzipi Livni on Monday that Turkey supported the international community's three preconditions for accepting Hamas. The newspaper wrote that the conversation was kept under wraps both in Israel and Turkey.

Israel Radio and leading web sites reported that this morning IDF soldiers shot dead a young Palestinian man while they were carrying out an arrest raid in Qabatiyah, near the West Bank city of Jenin. The media quoted Palestinian security officials as saying that the victim was mentally handicapped and was carrying a toy rifle. The media quoted the IDF as saying that the Palestinian was armed.

Ha'aretz cited Palestinian Media Watch, an organization that monitors Palestinian media and textbooks, as saying that a Hamas web site recently published the videotape wills of two suicide bombers, with two main messages: one is directed to the Jews whose blood Hamas pledges to drink until they flee from the land of the Muslims, and the other is devoted to a mother who helps her son plan a suicide attack.

All media reported that on Tuesday, Justice Mishael Cheshin called the PA an "enemy government" during a High Court of Justice hearing on family reunification. Cheshin said family unification endangers Israel unnecessarily in what he described as wartime, and said the Palestinians' interest in unification takes a back seat to Israel's self-defense. The media reported that a report compiled by a governmental committee recommends stricter rules for granting Israeli citizenship to Palestinians.

All media reported on the maiden appearance of Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin, the head of IDF Intelligence, before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Tuesday. Yediot quoted Yadlin as saying that Iran is forming an alliance with Syria.

All media (banners in most newspapers) reported that on Tuesday, the Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court sentenced former MK Omri Sharon to nine months in prison plus a 300,000-shekel (around USD 63,000) fine for raising illegal campaign contributions for his father, PM Sharon. Judge Edna Bekenstein, who presided over the court session, was quoted as saying: "[Omri] viewed all means as justified, whether legal or criminal ... as long as his father was elected to the desired position." Bekenstein also said: "Recently, we have heard over and over about the 'political swamp.' This swamp must be dried out. The courts' role in drying it up is through suitable sentences." Leading media cited similar statements by A-G Menachem Mazuz and State Attorney Eran Shendar. The media said that the severity of the sentence was surprising. The media reported that Kadima could be harmed by the sentence. In particular, The Jerusalem Post reported that the Likud hopes to gain from Omri's fall.

Israel Radio reported that last night, the car of a senior police officer who was in charge of the evacuation of the Amona settler outpost was torched near his home in central Israel. The radio cited threats on members of the security forces who carried out the evacuation.

Israel Radio reported that China is furious over the Dalai Lama's visit to Israel, which starts today. The radio quoted China's Consul in Tel Aviv Lu Ching as saying that the fact that a promise made to China that the Dalai Lama would not meet with Israeli officials

during his visit is not enough, and that Israel should have prevented him from visiting the country. Lu Ching compared the Dalai Lama with Hamas.

In a report from Baku, Ha'aretz wrote that Azerbaijani Jews are worried over the strengthening of radical Islamists in their country, and that they said they feel the anti-Jewish hostility there is growing.

Maariv reported that the Foreign Ministry, in cooperation with Jewish communities in the U.S., has announced it would contribute USD 120,000 to needy African countries.

Maariv reported that on Monday, two officials from the Israeli Consulate-General in Los Angeles briefed the American actress Sharon Stone in her home ahead of her upcoming visit to Israel.

Mideast:

Summary:

Liberal columnist Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "If we manage to push Hamas back into the opposition, we will save the Palestine branch of Islamic fundamentalism from crashing into the ground of reality."

Veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin Eytan Haber opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Please note the name of the latest Palestinian idiot.... This is Mahmoud Zahar, the Hamas leader who announced festively that his organization would never recognize the State of Israel and would strike to wipe it out."

Zalman Shoval, President of the Israel-America Chamber of Commerce, senior Likud member, and former ambassador to the U.S., wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "A Palestinian state ... was claimed to be in Israel's supreme interest. It isn't, and never was!"

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "All the talk about 'we will never speak,' in Bush's fundamentalist language, is a return to the old logorrhea of Israeli policy."

The 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, who begins a five-day visit to Israel today, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "Residents of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.... There is no other alternative than to start a dialogue based on mutual trust and friendship."

Block Quotes:

I. "Let Hamas Fail"

Liberal columnist Dr. Gadi Taub wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 15): "So far, Israel's response to Hamas's rise has been more from the gut and less from the head.... In a gut reaction, we are trying to snatch away the spoiled soup [the Palestinians] cooked, instead of letting them eat it for a while. If instead of shouting that we will not talk by any means, that there is no way, that until this and until that, we will not permit and not rest -- if instead of all this, we were to be quiet for a bit, we would be in a much better position. We would let them go out on a limb, and not rashly go out on our own limb.... What is Israel doing in the meantime? It is trying to push Hamas back into the opposition, where it enjoys a great relative advantage, and where its terror attacks have no real cost. There, in the opposition, it can continue to portray itself as a kind of Robin Hood, which hits and runs, in the service of its people. If the shortsighted Israeli policy succeeds, if we manage to push Hamas back into the opposition, we will save the Palestine branch of Islamic fundamentalism from crashing into the ground of reality.... [As the government,] it will be forced to negotiate -- openly or covertly -- with U.S. administration officials, instead of making war cries from the gallery. And it will find that the moderate Arab countries, which fear the danger of fundamentalism even more than we do, will not welcome its extremist positions.... So why not let Hamas discover this, instead of pushing it into a position where it does not need our oxygen? Why should we cram them into a corner and let them wriggle free? Why should the elephant be afraid of the mouse, instead

of the mouse being afraid of the elephant?"

II. "War Monger"

Veteran op-ed writer and assistant to the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin Eytan Haber opined in an editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 15): "Please note the name of the latest Palestinian idiot. We will yet hear and read a lot about him, before he too passes on, accompanied by the roar of a helicopter's engine. This is Mahmoud Zahar, the Hamas leader who announced festively that his organization would never recognize the State of Israel and would strike to wipe it out. How unfortunate is the Palestinian people: First it had the Mufti [of Jerusalem Haj Amin el-Husseini], who led it to the edge of the precipice, then Ahmed Shukeiri, who led it to the peaks of ridicule, and afterwards Yasser Arafat, who led it through the paths of blood, and now Mahmoud Zahar, the man who was given a finger and wants the whole hand -- and for what? Perhaps to help in identifying [him] by means of the remaining fingerprints?"

III. "Put Palestinian Statehood on Hold"

Zalman Shoval, President of the Israel-America Chamber of Commerce, senior Likud member, and former ambassador to the U.S., wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 15): "Ever since President George Bush's unveiling of his vision for Arab-Israeli peace we have been told that Palestinian statehood would bring the separation desired by most Israelis, peaceful coexistence with our Palestinian neighbors, and the conclusive elimination of the demographic threat. A Palestinian state, in short, was claimed to be in Israel's supreme interest. It isn't, and never was!.... The question now is how seriously the Quartet, and even the U.S., will take their own conditions for Palestinian statehood.... It is clear that Hamas's continuing refusal to take upon itself the most fundamental obligations under the road map, let alone previous agreements such as Oslo, Paris, Wye and Sharm e-Sheikh, and do away with the 'right of return' dictates a reevaluation of Palestinian statehood as an American and Israeli goal. Not even the continuing role of the Quartet, in light of Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to break ranks and invite Hamas to Moscow, should be taken for granted.... All this will require a major diplomatic effort on Israel's behalf, including making it clear that we hold the keys to the very idea of Palestinian statehood."

IV. "The Orphan of the Campaign"

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 15): "The heads of all [Israeli] parties, to one extent or another, are surrendering to what still, mistakenly, looks like the public's desire: eternal enmity toward the Palestinian administration, whatever it might be. Hamas has replaced the ghouls whom we had always seen swarming on the other side. Even Meretz-Yahad is blurring its old argument that it is necessary to talk with any Palestinian leadership.... All the talk about 'we will never speak,' in Bush's fundamentalist language, is a return to the old logorrhea of Israeli policy. The idea of continuing to strangle those unpleasant Palestinians and send them to new elections is an upgrading of Golda Meir to a 2006 model. An open-eyed position on this anachronism must be one of the main criteria for sensible voters a month and a half from now."

V. "Fighting Isn't a Natural Phenomenon"

The 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, who begins a five-day visit to Israel today, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (February 15): "The holy region in which you -- residents of Israel and the Palestinian Authority -- live has suffered from a long-drawn-out struggle for decades.... Until recently, a very solid view pervaded the world -- 'we' against 'they,' 'ours' against 'theirs.' Naturally such a position made it hard to reach durable solutions. Recent years have proved to the entire world that this isn't the way to solve disputes. Disagreements and fighting aren't inevitable -- they are man-made.... The only realistic way to reduce suffering and the dispute is by focusing on common ground in problems and needs, and then to try to reach a mutual resolution that will fulfill common interests and bring joint benefits to both sides. There is no other alternative than to start a dialogue based on mutual trust and friendship. Only thus is

there an opportunity to resolve problems. I'll be happy to present my view to you. I hope to visit with you again."

JONES